

In memory of my late father, Imam Abdullah Akbar
also known as "Jingles"

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Introduction

This book highlights how the Prophet (peace be upon him), in dealing with racism and discrimination within the early Muslim community and beyond, brought about a lasting change and a call for unity in his brief twenty-three years of prophethood. Muslims believe that the best of guidance is the guidance of the Messenger of Allah. If Muslims and non-Muslims alike applied his guidance to the problem of racism, it would be eradicated like the institution of slavery has been officially abolished globally.

This topic is relevant because the *Ummah* (community) of Islam is currently under attack and in crisis in nearly every part of the globe—a stark contrast to our rich Islamic history—a highlight being the eight hundred years when the Muslims controlled Spain. At the time, Spain, which was the gateway into Europe for North Africa, the Middle East, and East Asia, had already been exposed to Islam, which for the most part had been accepted and assimilated into the community.

In reflecting on Islamic history, the question arises as to what has caused the Muslim community to become so disunited from country to country, state to state, and village to village? It was only a few centuries ago that the *Ummah* of Muslims was united under one leader, or Caliph, and took care of their poor and neglected.¹ Furthermore, the unrest and discrimination that is present among the entire

has resulted in increased conflicts between people of color and law enforcement.

There are not too many examples in history of a balanced society in which all of its citizens' concerns are addressed. However, no society to date, with such political, social, and economic strife has transformed to become a model society in less than a quarter century. How did the Prophet (pbuh) change the social construct of his people and all of the Hejaz (Arabian Peninsula)? What steps did he take to bring the teachings of Islam into practice? This will be our focus in the following chapters.

2

The Non-Arab Companions

It is a common misconception that Islam is a religion of the Arabs and for the Arabs. However, as a percentage, Arabs make up a minority of the Muslim population, with the bulk of adherents found throughout Asia. Before examining the number of non-Arab companions of the Prophet (pbuh), here are some interesting facts:

- There are approximately 1.7 billion Muslims in the world—about 23% of the world's population.¹
- Arabs comprise roughly 20% of the Muslim population.²
- Approximately 62% of the world's Muslims live in South and Southeast Asia, with over 1 billion adherents.³
- The largest Muslim country is Indonesia.
- The total number of Muslims is currently greater than the number of Catholics.
- India has 160 million Muslims (13.4%) which is the largest number of Muslims in a non-Islamic country.
- The study found more Muslims in the United Kingdom than in Lebanon and more in China than in Syria.⁴

Persian (East Asia)

Salman the Persian, or Salman al-Farsi, born Rouzbeh in the city of Kazerun in Fars Province was a companion of the Prophet (pbuh) and the first Persian convert to Islam. During some of his later meetings with the other Sahabah, he is referred to as Abu Abdullah ("Father of Abdullah"). He is credited with the idea to build the ditch around Medina when it was attacked by Mecca in the Battle of the Trench (Ghuzwah al-Khandaq). He was raised as a Zoroastrian, then attracted to Christianity, and then converted to Islam after meeting Muhammad in the city of Yathrib, which later became Medina.

Byzantine Empire (Europe)

Suhayb ibn Sinan (also known as Suhayb Ar-Rumi) was born surrounded by comfort and luxury: his father was a famous governor in Iraq long before the advent of Islam. Young Suhayb was captured along with a large number of young boys in his community by some Roman invaders and spent years in bondage in the Byzantine Empire. Suhayb was taken by slave traders until his long journey finally ended in Mecca, where he was sold to Abdullah ibn Jud'an. So amazed by his intelligence, energy, and sincerity, his master set him free, giving him the privilege to trade with him. Converting to Islam after meeting the Prophet (pbuh), the ruling tribe of Quraysh soon learned of Suhayb's acceptance of Islam and began harassing him. Resolved to accompany Muhammad and Abu Bakr to Medina, the Quraysh discovered his intentions and placed guards over him to prevent him from leaving Mecca. Eventually, he migrated to Medina leaving the wealth he had acquired through trade to win his freedom.

Abyssinian (Ethiopia)

Bilal ibn Rabah was an Abyssinian (Ethiopian) and was among the early converts to Islam. Bilal was brought to Mecca as a slave in the house of a Quraysh chief. He was humiliated and oppressed because of his low status and dark skin; yet he bore his trials with patience. In his heart, Bilal knew that the idols he was forced to worship could not bring him any good or harm, so when he heard of the new Prophet (pbuh) who called people to worship Allah alone and to treat each other with justice and equality, he became interested in Islam.

Ashama ibn Abjar was Emperor or Al-Najashi of Aksum at the time of the Prophet (pbuh), and gave refuge to several Muslims in the Kingdom of Aksum (a Christian kingdom). Due to persecution from the contemporary Arab leadership in Mecca (the Quraysh), a number of Muslims immigrated to Aksum. In response, the Quraysh leaders sent Amr ibn al-Aas to bring them back to Mecca where they would be tortured or killed. Amr intended to show Al-Najashi that the Muslims did not believe in Isa (Jesus) as the king did, with the goal that once the Muslims informed the king what they believed about Isa he would become upset and hand them over. This resulted in a famous dialogue between Al-Najashi and Ja'far ibn Abi Talib, the spokesman of the Muslim migrants, who recited some verses from the chapter of Maryam (Mary) in the Qur'an. According to Ibn Hisham, Al-Najashi and the Ethiopian Orthodox priests in his court were greatly affected by the touching verses that they began to shed tears. Although Al-Najashi had never met the Prophet (pbuh), he accepted Islam.

steadfastness upon Islam, piety or character but rather in the dollar amount in their bank account. Certainly, contemporary society can benefit from the social reforms that were instituted by the Prophet (pbuh) so that, like the institution of slavery, the issues of racism and discrimination can be eradicated and only read about in history.

6

The Rights of Women

The rights and liberties of women were also on the agenda of the Prophet (pbuh). Although we noted earlier that women, along with the poor, the non-Arab (*'ajam*), the disabled, and the orphaned were mistreated not only in the Arabian Peninsula but across the globe, it is necessary to speak directly concerning women's issues. Inequality among the genders continues to be addressed in twenty-first-century America—a society that is regarded by some as the most liberal in the world. A major hurdle that still remains for women in America is the right to equal pay. Unfortunately, some of the issues that negatively impacted the lives of women living in seventh-century Arabia remain today. These include issues such as:

- forced marriage
- unequal pay for services
- inability to participate equally in political affairs
- no rights regarding inheritance
- unequal rights regarding custody of children
- no right to life as many women are buried at birth

While many of these issues resonate in our modern era, one theme that is common to all is the idea that women are deficient in intellect, that is, inferior to men. This is the basis from which all criticism of women branches.

Notes

Introduction

1. A Caliphate is a form of Islamic government led by a person considered a political and religious successor to the prophet Muhammad and a leader of the entire Muslim community. The last Caliphate was the Ottoman Caliphate, which ruled most of the Islamic world from 1362-1924, but did not recognize the authority of the Abbasid Caliphate under the Mamluk Sultanate of Cairo (1261-1517).
2. A selfie is a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. They are usually flattering and made to appear casual. Most selfies are taken with a camera held at arm's length or pointed at a mirror, rather than by using a self-timer.
3. The Islamic testimony declaring belief in the oneness of God and the acceptance of Muhammad as God's prophet.

Chapter 1: Race and Its Dangers

1. Cf. The Oxford English Dictionary, http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/race#race-2.
2. Suspended due to the civil war and atrocities committed by the regime of president Bashar al-Assad.
3. Other narrations show that the Makhzumi women did not technically "steal" in the sense of going out and taking something without the owner's knowledge. She, in fact, would borrow things and simply not return them. We learn from this, that to borrow items with the intention of not returning them is equivalent to stealing and will receive the same punishment.

It was narrated from Ibn 'Uyayr (r), may Allah be pleased with them both, that a Makhzumi woman used to borrow things then deny that she had borrowed them, so the Prophet (pbuh) ordered that her hand be cut off. (Sunan Nasai)

4. This incident of Bilal and Abu Dhār is well known. Some scholars have claimed that it was between Abu Dhār and not Bilal but a different former black slave. However, we do have supporting evidence that this incident did in fact take place. It is found from the statement of Abu Dhār himself in another hadith found in the Sunan of Abu Dawud, Chapter Kitab Al-Adab and graded as Sahih by Shaykh al-Albani. Ma'rur b. Suwaid said: "I saw Abu Dhār at Rab'udhah. He was wearing a thick cloak, and his slave also wore a similar one. He said: the people said: Abu Dhār! (it would be better) if you could take the cloak which your slave wore, and you combined that with, and it would be a pair of garments (hullah) and you would clothe him with another garment. He said: Abu Dhār said: I abused a man whose mother was a non-Arab and I reviled him for his mother. He complained against me to the apostle of Allah (May peace be upon him). He said: Abu Dhār: You are a man who has a characteristic of pre-Islamic days. He said: they are your brethren; Allah has given you superiority over them; sell those who do not please you and do not punish Allah's creatures."
5. As noted above, there is the hadith reported by Al-Ma'rur ibn Suwaid: "I saw Abu Dhār wearing a robe and his slave was also wearing a robe. We asked him about that and he said, 'I insulted a man and he complained about me to the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace,' and the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said to me, 'Did you insult him by his mother?' Yes," I replied. He said, 'Your brothers are your property. Allah has put them under your authority. If someone has his brother under his authority, he should feed him from what he eats and clothe him from what he wears and not burden him with anything that will be too much for him. If you burden him with what will be too much for him, then help him!'"